



Coast Guard HR Flag Voice 178

Diversity Summit II: Out of Many, One - Leveraging America's Strength

As previously discussed in Flag Voice 170, we recently held the Coast Guard's second Diversity Summit at the Coast Guard Academy in New London, Connecticut on 9-11 April 2002. The theme of this Summit was *Out of Many, One -- Leveraging America's Strength*. Over 320 people attended, representing every conceivable aspect of Team Coast Guard. The Summit program included both general sessions featuring addresses by Coast Guard Leaders, including the Commandant, the Vice Commandant and the Master Chief Petty Officer of the Coast Guard and breakout panel discussions on topics related to diversity management within the workforce featuring presentations by experts in the their field. During the Summit's midpoint, the participants celebrated their cultural diversity with dinner and entertainment.

The Summit was a highly successful learning experience. Leaders, human resource policy makers, process owners, and Coast Guard members exchanged candid opinions and personal anecdotes, often challenging each other's beliefs. Many life experiences were shared, including those most disturbing, in which Coast Guard members were made to feel not valued. The consequence of this poor leadership style sometimes manifested itself in severe morale problems, mission degradation and, unfortunately, the ultimate loss of some of these individuals from the Service. I expect all attendees felt uncomfortable at least once and sometimes found themselves questioning their own perceptions. Overall, participants focused on comprehending the underlying issues negatively affecting the retention of our most valuable resource-*our people*.

Are there outputs from the Summit? One constant theme during the Summit was the request for more feedback. This Flag Voice announces that a synopsis of what transpired at the Summit is available on the Coast Guard intranet at the following address: <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/g-w/g-wt/g-wtl/divsum2/>. A summary of the verbal and written questions passed during the Summit's six breakout sessions and the **Top Two Concerns** raised at each session are included on the Web site.

The questions posed during the Summit are not answered or addressed individually on the website. The ensuing informative and thought provoking dialogue from the panelists in response to these questions was too voluminous to be recorded in this format. The spectrum of questions raised during the breakout sessions ranged from highly emotional individual perceptions to questions of policy. The panelists did an outstanding job fielding questions on a wide variety of emotionally charged issues and the session attendees left with a more comprehensive understanding of the topics. All of the questions are being compiled in a database that will be forwarded to the appropriate subcommittee of the Commandant's Diversity Advisory Council (DAC) for analysis. The DAC subcommittees will prioritize, research, and then take for action the issues they determine to be the highest priority. In the interim, we are providing

a list of questions from each breakout session to illustrate the scope of discussions and to show the general flavor of the dialogue at the Summit.

What is the next step? One goal of the Summit was to help focus our strategic diversity efforts on the most pressing concerns for members of Team Coast Guard. The **Top Two Concerns** identified at each breakout sessions, twelve in total, will be incorporated into a detailed After Action Report which will summarize and attempt to capture the essence of the discussion surrounding these topics. This report will also contain any recommendations to address these items and will be routed through the chain of command to the Commandant.

Effective diversity management is a journey without an end. In today's workplace, diversity effectiveness is a critical element of positive leadership- it is not merely a "nice-to-have." Leveraging diversity will give the Coast Guard the competitive edge it needs *and* allow us to attract, develop and retain the best members of Team Coast Guard. I encourage all leaders to take the time to review this first available output to gather a sense of the issues that affect *all* of our people. I also highly encourage every aspect of Coast Guard leadership to notify all members within their areas of responsibility of the availability of this Summit output. Together we can take lessons learned at this Summit to propel the Coast Guard into becoming an **Employer of Choice** for all our members, whether active, reserve, civilian or auxiliarist and truly embody our concept of **Team Coast Guard**.

Regards, R. D. Sirois



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